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October 15, 2009

The Honorable Kathy Angerer
House Majority Floor Leader
Chair, Committee on Ethics and Elections
Room 155 Capitol Building
P.O. Box 30014
Lansing, MI 48909-7514

The Honorable Jennifer Haase
Vice-Chair, Committee on Ethics and Elections
N-796 House Office Building
P.O. Box 30014
Lansing, MI 48909-7514

The Honorable Kim Meltzer
Minority Vice-Chair, Committee on Ethics and Elections
N-797 House Office Building
P.O. Box 30014
Lansing, MI 48909-7514

Dear Representatives Angerer, Haase and Meltzer:

On behalf of the Pew Center on the States' Election Initiatives, I am writing to provide comments about HB 5279, which is currently before your committee and would improve the election system for Michigan's overseas and military voters by allowing for the transmittal of blank absent voter ballots via e-mail. As you may know, Pew has been working actively to raise awareness of the challenges facing military and overseas voters and I applaud the committee's willingness to address this important issue.

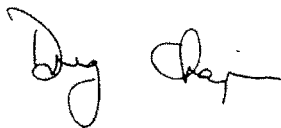
As outlined in our report, *No Time to Vote*, Michigan is among the 25 states and the District of Columbia that do not allow overseas voters enough time to vote. As such, Pew respectfully recommends that HB 5279 be amended to include provisions that would provide for a minimum of 45 days for the transmission and return of overseas absent voter ballots. This, combined with allowing for the electronic transmittal of blank ballots, will give Michigan's overseas military voters time to receive and return a ballot and have it counted.

Second, we strongly encourage you to consider including provisions that provide a safety net for voters who request an absent voter ballot but do not receive one in time to vote. Expanding the use of the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB) to state and local elections is a viable option that provides military and overseas voters the ability to cast a ballot if some aspect of the absent voter process goes awry.

Pew can also provide technical assistance to Michigan in implementing these necessary reforms. Pew has partnered with election officials and Google, Inc. on the Voting Information Project (VIP), which allows election officials to make official voting information more readily available via the Internet and mobile technology, granting voters access to critical voting information such as how to register, where to vote and what's on the ballot. For military and overseas civilian voters, this means that official data can be instantly accessed anywhere around the world. In addition, VIP can be used to automatically populate FWABs with candidate and ballot information based upon where a military or overseas civilian voter is registered to vote in the United States, removing the risk of ballots being called into question because of confusion about a voter's intent.

In closing, I thank you again for your consideration of this important issue and welcome the opportunity to discuss Pew's recommendations further. All of us at the Pew Center on the States stand ready to work with you and your colleagues to improve the voting system for Michigan's military and overseas voters. I may be reached at 202-552-2113 or via e-mail at dchapin@pewtrusts.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Doug Chapin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Doug" and last name "Chapin" clearly distinguishable.

Doug Chapin
Director, Election Initiatives
Pew Center on the States